

As many of you know, I got out of quarantine last Sunday. I had anointed someone who turned out to have the coronavirus. I never had any symptoms, so I dodged the bullet this time – but let's just say I had a lot of time on my hands. What to do? Well, one of my staff dropped off some supplies the first day I was in quarantine – and among the goodies was a puzzle! This was a brilliant choice because I'm a puzzler. This seems strange to some people – why sit around fitting these little pieces of cardboard together? How boring and pathetically uncool. But I find putting a puzzle together allows my mind to engage elsewhere, which is relaxing (You might check it out). So, when I saw that puzzle a couple of weeks ago at the beginning of my isolation, I was excited.

What does this have to do with the Man Born Blind? Hang with me. When you start a puzzle you first spread out and turn over all the pieces, picture side up. There are about a thousand pieces (doing puzzles with fewer than 1,000 pieces is only for wimps). As you do this you separate all the edge pieces. You start a puzzle by completing the

border, so as you turn over the pieces you are also separating all those with flat edges that will form the outer edge of the puzzle.

But you never find all the edge pieces that way. There are always a few that get by your eyes. So, after putting together most of the border, you realize there are gaps. You missed three or four edge pieces. And you must go back to the 1,000 pieces and start looking all over again for flat edges. And here we're getting closer to the Gospel.

It's hard to discern the flat edges among the riot of colors and shapes appearing on all the little cardboard pieces. The silhouettes of the pieces are camouflaged by all the busyness. Your eyes pass over the edge pieces. It's really hard to find them – a needle in a haystack. So, the clever technique is to get your eyes real low, at table level, so all you see is the glare of the light coming off the lacquered finish of the pieces. At that low angle the colors and pictures disappear – and only the basic outline of the piece's shape remains. That makes it easy (or easier) to find the few remaining straight edges. (And now we come at

last to the Gospel). As I was putting together my puzzle in quarantine and was kneeling down at table level to find the stray edge pieces, it suddenly struck me, “This is also how the spiritual life works!”

In the Gospel today Jesus tells the Man Born blind, “I came into this world for judgement, so that those who do not see might see.” And in our first reading God tells Samuel, “Not as man sees does God see, because man sees the appearance, but the Lord looks into the heart.” We humans are so often distracted by the colors and lines of this world. They camouflage the deeper shape of reality, so we can’t see what’s really there, or at least, we can’t see as God does.

So, how do we gain that divine sight? By going higher? Looking down on the world? That doesn’t work any better in life than in puzzling. The Pharisees look down on the world (and the Blind Man) and are blinded because they think they can see everything – pride. “If you were blind, you would have no sin; but now you are saying, ‘We see,’ so your sin remains.”

But what does give us sight is going lower – kneeling, in fact. When I was kneeling beside that table it struck me, “It’s only when we are brought low – to our knees – that we can see the flat edges of our lives, the real shape of things.” And here I want to address the times we find ourselves in. During this crisis of the coronavirus we’re being brought low. We’re afraid for a lot of reasons – death, sickness, job loss, but central to our fears is being out of control. We in the prosperous, comfortable, West, especially, are so used to being in control and having power even over suffering, that we feel great anxiety because we don’t know what’s going to happen to us. This simple virus is humbling us, bringing us low.

So . . . we need to take advantage of that. This is an opportunity, because when we’re on our knees we can see the real shape of things more clearly. We have all been thrown off our lives by this event. Think about it: you have to view this mass from your homes! But there will be moments of grace during these weeks and months. We must not miss

out on those. Pay attention: Jesus is going to show us things about ourselves, the world, and Him, that we've missed up to now because they've been camouflaged by the surface busyness of our lives.

These days of enforced closeness with spouse and family offer a time to grow together – or come apart at the seams. Who are you as a couple or family really? You'll find out. This is a time when we will have the chance to pray more for Lent. Will we? We'll learn a little bit about our real relationship with Jesus now, what that's really like. For some of us this absence from the Eucharist will bring us a greater hunger for it. Others will drift away from the mass altogether without the easy access and obligation. Some of us will grow in trust of God, others in this time of anxiety will despair of His help or reality. Which will it be for me? When we're brought to our knees, we'll learn a lot about our true shape, who we really are. But then we can ask God to change us.

And we must remember, while we can be brought to our knees involuntarily by shocks such as this pandemic, we can also humble

ourselves willingly. Going to our knees in prayer is also always available to us – we can see ourselves and the world from that divine point of view any time we want to, if we humble ourselves before God.

Whenever pride's grip on us weakens even for a moment, there's chance for new clarity of sight. We can discover our weakness – and God's strength. This is frightening because we like to be in control. But if we follow the Blind Man, and are humble to Jesus' directions, Christ will help us see in a new way during this crisis. Let us use the days of this strange Lent to go lower and spend more time on our knees, and let Jesus open our eyes to the true shape of things.